



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 05, 2006

06-48

NEW LAW SENDS MESSAGE TO TEEN DRIVERS: NOT AN OUNCE OF TOLERANCE FOR UNDERAGE DRINKING

(Santa Ana) The head of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, joined an Orange County legislator, the California Highway Patrol and MADD to put teen drivers on notice: beginning January 1, drinking and driving is no longer a civil penalty, but a crime.

The new law is the result of legislation recently signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to toughen penalties on minors who drink and drive. AB 2752 (Spitzer, R – Orange) makes it crime, punishable by a fine, for anyone under the age of 21 to operate a vehicle with a blood alcohol content of .01 or above.

“This new law represents one more effort to reduce the incidents of underage drinking and driving in California and at the same time save the lives of our young people,” said Sunne Wright McPeak, Secretary of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency that oversees the CHP.

The bill eliminates the mixed message sent by current law which makes it a criminal offense for a person under the age of 21 to possess an alcoholic beverage, but does not make it illegal for that same person to get behind the wheel of a vehicle and drive.

"This bill gives California a true zero-tolerance policy for underage drinking and driving," stated Assemblymember Todd Spitzer. "Current law only allows for law enforcement to impound an underage driver's car for one day and notify the DMV of the incident. This legislation will get the real attention of parents, the teenage driver, the DMV, police and insurance companies before an underage driver kills or injures someone."

Statistics show 1,348 minors were cited by CHP officers for driving after having consumed alcohol. In 2005 there were 5,218 collisions which involved underage alcohol consumption, including 122 fatal crashes. CHP educational programs, such as Start Smart, Right Turn, and Every 15 Minutes, warn young drivers of the dangers of drinking and driving.

“But some people don’t respond to our educational efforts, so that means we have to resort to enforcement and penalties,” warned CHP Chief Skip Carter. Carter noted that Operation STAR and holiday maximum enforcement periods have cracked down on DUI the past couple of years. “This will be one more weapon in our arsenal to enforce traffic safety laws and save lives,” said Chief Carter.

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